

Following the defeat of Taliban forces in Afghanistan a group of high-ranking Al-Qaida commanders decided to restructure Al-Qaida's military campaign against the West. In 2002 and 2003, Bin Laden's shift in strategy became noticeable following a series of dramatic kamikaze bombing attacks targeting Westerners in a host of countries, from Indonesia to Morocco. Al-Qaida's then-official website—the Al-Neda Center for Islamic Studies and Research—acknowledged that these attacks marked a new phase in evolution for Al-Qaida: “the al-Qaidah Organization has adopted a strategy in its war with the Americans based on expanding the battlefield and exhausting the enemy, who spread his interests over the globe, with successive and varied blows... Expanding the battlefield has invaluable benefits. The enemy, who needed to protect his country only, realized that he needed to protect his huge interests in every country. The more diversified and distant the areas in which operations take place, the more exhausting it becomes for the enemy, the more he needs to stretch his resources, and the more he becomes terrified.”³ Al-Qaida currently has formal franchises or informal alliances with local militant groups across the Muslim world, including in Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Chechnya, Algeria, Somalia, Indonesia, Morocco, and beyond.

II. Al-Qaida's Operations in Saudi Arabia

Since the founding of the Al-Qaida terrorist organization in Afghanistan in 1988, Saudi Arabian nationals—exemplified by Al-Qaida chief Usama Bin Laden—have played key roles throughout its global network. As many as 25,000 Saudis have received military training or experience abroad in various Arab-Afghan conflict zones, according to estimates by Saudi intelligence.⁴ Indeed, fifteen of the nineteen suicide hijackers responsible for the September 11 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington D.C. were from Saudi Arabia.⁵ However, until the events of 9/11, the vibrant Al-Qaida network hidden within the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was chiefly concerned with fundraising and recruitment—as opposed to military strikes at targets within the Arabian Peninsula. Between 1988 and 2002, Sunni militants loyal to Bin Laden had only succeeded in carrying out one major terrorist attack on the Peninsula: the November 1995 bombing of a joint Saudi-U.S. military office in Riyadh by three Saudi Arab-Afghans who had recently returned from frontline combat with mujahideen units in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The sudden shift in behavior by Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula following September 11, 2001 is primarily attributable to the subsequent defeat of Al-Qaida and Taliban forces at the Tora Bora mountain redoubt three months later. In December 2001, Afghan mujahideen forces with limited U.S. support engaged large groups of Al-Qaida fighters in a cave complex called Tora Bora in southeastern Afghanistan near the Pakistani border. According to the former Al-Qaida press agency Azzam Publications, “The Tora Bora mountain range comprises of low foothills and lofty mountains. It was expected for the Americans to land at the lower foothills first. Therefore, the

³ Data CD6\12 PDFs From Laptop\Operation 11 Rabi ul Awal.pdf, Pages 35-36.

⁴ Jehl, Douglas. “Holy War Lured Saudis as Rulers Looked Away.” *The New York Times*, December 27, 2001.

⁵ *The 9/11 Commission Report*. Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States. July 22, 2004.

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However, Bin Laden had apparently overestimated the importance of group centralization, neglecting the benefits afforded to him by Al-Qaida's loose, amalgamated infrastructure. Already by the late 1980s, those around Bin Laden warned him that their attempts to create strict administration and hierarchy within Al-Qaida were ending in disaster. Mamdouh Salim—appointed by Bin Laden to assist him in the regimentation of the Arabs in Afghanistan—admitted in mujahideen memoirs, “we tried our best to correct the brothers, but I should admit that... I was mistaken about the task of management. I thought of people what I had read about them in books—if you were to say to someone, ‘Fear Allah’, then that’s fine, he would fear Allah! ...I believed that just like I could flip a switch to make a light turn on and off, I could also similarly handle people!”⁴ After a short period of time, Salim grew so exasperated that he offered his resignation to Bin Laden as chief administrator of his nascent organization.

Bin Laden also failed to fully grasp how the relative “openness” of his movement and the perceived lack of hierarchy appealed to young jihadist recruits. In the world of Al-Qaida and the Arab-Afghans, even the most junior of operatives could potentially gain high status within the organization by either demonstrating useful skills, or else by volunteering to sacrifice themselves on behalf of the mission. In other words, Al-Qaida offered an equal opportunity at fame and recognition to nearly any sympathetic soul willing to risk death or imprisonment. When agents from the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) apprehended a junior Al-Qaida operative who helped build the suicide truck bombs used to attack two U.S. embassies in East Africa in 1998, he boasted of his own role in the plot and explained that he “was attracted to Usama Bin Ladin and the group Al Qaeda because it did not matter what nationality you were” and because Al Qaeda members did not explicitly follow “orders from a chain of command” in the same way as more traditional terrorist organizations.⁵

Events in Afghanistan immediately following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States would again showcase the weaknesses of over-centralization and leave Al-Qaida no choice but to embrace the development of a more diffuse and self-sufficient network of international operatives. In December 2001, Afghan mujahideen forces with limited U.S. support directly engaged large groups of unified Al-Qaida fighters in a cave complex called Tora Bora in southeastern Afghanistan near the mountainous Pakistani border. According to the former Al-Qaida press agency Azzam Publications, “It was expected for the Americans to land at the lower foothills first. Therefore, the Commander of the Mujahideen gave the order for new and relatively inexperienced brothers to go to the higher mountains, leaving the experienced fighters at the bottom.”⁶ The strategy proved ineffective as a result of smothering U.S. tactical airstrikes: “there was no difference between the night and the day: the sky was raining

3\ 516.JPG; \Data CD6\Catalogue Print 3\ 518.JPG; \Data CD6\Catalogue Print 3\ 524.JPG; \Data CD6\Catalogue Print 3\ 538.JPG; \Data CD6\Catalogue Print 3\ 545.JPG; \Data CD6\Catalogue Print 3\ 568.JPG; \Data CD6\Catalogue Print 3\ 681.JPG

⁴ Muhammad, Basil. *Al-Ansaru l'Arab fi Afghanistan*. The Committee for Islamic Benevolence Publications; ©1991. Page 196.

⁵ Government Exhibit GX-6 (Interview of Mohammed Sadiq Odeh by FBI Agent John Anticev). *U.S. v. Usama Bin Laden, et al.* S(7) 98 Cr. 1023 (LBS). United States District Court, Southern District of New York.

⁶ Azzam Publications. “Suraqah al-Andalusi: Profile of Azzam.Com Correspondent Martyred in Afghanistan: A Story for Dead Hearts.” <http://www.azzam.com>. December 2001.